

Arizona lawmakers say the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program provides critical resources for state and local law enforcement agencies

WASHINGTON - U.S. Reps. Gabrielle Giffords, Harry Mitchell and Ann Kirkpatrick joined forces today to urge top budget writers in Congress to fund a program that reimburses state and local law enforcement agencies for the cost of arresting and jailing illegal immigrants.

The Arizona lawmakers are asking for at least \$400 million for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, which last year provided \$17.4 million to the Pima County Sheriff's Office and other Arizona law enforcement agencies.

Although funding for SCAAP has been eliminated in the budget proposal President Obama sent to Congress on Thursday, Giffords, Mitchell and Kirkpatrick say the 15-year old program is a critical source of funds for cash-strapped state and local agencies that are forced to divert resources from public safety services to deal with illegal immigrants.

The lawmakers make their case in a letter sent today to Reps. David Obey and Jerry Lewis, the top Democrat and Republican on the House Appropriations Committee, and Reps. Alan Mollohan and Frank Wolf, the top Democrat and Republican on the House Subcommittee on Science, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies.

As of this afternoon, the letter has been signed by 17 members of Congress - 12 Democrats and 5 Republicans from 8 states. The text is below.

"As Arizonans, we know the tremendous financial toll illegal immigration is taking on our state and local law enforcement agencies," said Giffords. "As long as sheriff's offices in Pima, Cochise and other Arizona counties are doing the federal government's job of securing our border, they must get compensated for it. That is the fair thing to do."

Mitchell and Kirkpatrick agreed. "Arizona's law enforcement communities are burdened by the federal government's inability to secure the border," said Mitchell. "Their manpower and their budgets have been stretched thin and the SCAAP funding has been critical to helping ease the financial strain. We urge the Appropriations Committee to restore this important immigration funding."

Said Kirkpatrick, "Our local law enforcement needs more resources, not fewer. They are being asked to play a critical role in combating illegal immigration and stopping the spread of drug cartel violence on the border into the United States. We cannot leave it to Arizona to pick up the tab for this national priority."

May 8, 2009

*The Honorable David Obey
Chairman,
House Appropriations Committee
Room H-218, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515*

*The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515*

*The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Science, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies
Room H-310, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515*

*The Honorable Frank Wolf
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Science, Justice,
Commerce and Related Agencies
Room H-310, The Capitol
Washington , DC 20515*

Dear Chairmen Obey and Mollohan and Ranking Members Lewis and Frelinghuysen:

We are writing to request that you include at least the \$400 million appropriated in Fiscal Year 2009 for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) in the Fiscal Year 2010 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies bill. Although SCAAP is currently authorized at \$950 million for FY2010 the President's budget has completely eliminated SCAAP funding.

SCAAP was created by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 to reimburse states and localities for the arrest, incarceration, and transportation costs associated with illegal immigrants who commit crimes in our communities (PL 103-322). As you know, securing our nation's borders is the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. Congress has consistently legislated that the federal government must either take undocumented criminals into federal custody or reach an agreement to compensate state and local jurisdictions for their incarceration. However, due to limited federal contributions, the bulk of these costs are borne by counties, some of which are among the poorest in the nation and traditionally operate with slim budgets and staffing.

Due to major state and county budget shortfalls, every dollar reduction in SCAAP reimbursement means a dollar less that a State can spend on essential public safety services. We therefore urge you to support our state and local law enforcement by adequately funding the SCAAP program in the Fiscal Year 2010 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

We appreciate the Committee's commitment to this critical program during consideration of the Fiscal Year 2009 bill and look forward to improving upon last year's efforts. Thank you for consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

*Gabrielle Giffords
Member of Congress*

*Harry Mitchell
Member of Congress*

*Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress*

*Trent Franks
Member of Congress*

Zack Space
Member of Congress

Brian Bilbray
Member of Congress

Jason Chaffetz
Member of Congress

Gary G. Miller
Member of Congress

Susan Davis
Member of Congress

Bob Filner

Member of Congress

Jane Harman
Member of Congress

Harry Teague
Member of Congress

Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress

Peter King
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress